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Implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction is the centrepiece of the United Nations efforts to address the causes of the disasters, which continue to devastate and impede the development of many countries. The Strategy's approaches are increasingly utilized to guide commitments and action by United Nations agencies and Governments, in pursuance of General Assembly resolutions 56/195 and 57/256. The present report provides an overview and updated information since last year's report (A/57/190) on the implementation of the Strategy, which is carried out by numerous international actors guided by the Inter-Agency Task Force on Disaster Reduction and the inter-agency secretariat of the Strategy. Highlights this year include follow-up to the decisions of the World Summit on Sustainable Development concerning risk assessment and disaster reduction, fostering partnerships to improve synergies and clarify roles between agencies, and addressing the issue of the impact of extreme weather events and the synergies between the adaptation to climate change and disaster reduction.

However, progress in implementing the Strategy is set against the backdrop of increased losses from natural hazards and related environmental and technological disasters. Over the first half of 2003, thousands of human lives were lost and great economic damage resulted from disasters such as earthquakes, floods and heat

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waves. Data on disasters are often ill-defined and incomplete, which hinders accurate analysis. Nevertheless, global summaries for 2002 report the occurrence of more than 500 disasters, with more than 10,000 people killed, 600 million people affected, $55 billion in total damages and $13 billion in insured losses.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development reinforced awareness of the need for risk and vulnerability reduction in order to secure sustainable development, and the imperative for development sectors to channel investment into disaster reduction activities. This is a major new challenge, since most resources for disaster reduction at present are drawn from the humanitarian sector; thus, the effect on development decisions and poverty reduction strategies is very limited.

The underlying problems of growing vulnerability to hazards are largely an outcome of development activities. Through myriad decisions being made every day at the local and international levels, the risk burdens of countries are being modified and inadvertently compounded. More work is needed to improve social protection targeting vulnerable communities in pursuance of the Millennium Development Goals.

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I. Activities carried out in support of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction

1. The vision of the key partners is that the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction should continue to become a more visible, recognized and flexible instrument for reducing the risk of and vulnerability to natural hazards and related environmental and technological disasters. In a relatively short period, the Strategy has made major contributions to raising awareness of the issues and developing accessible information and tools. It has attracted increasing attention and support from Governments and key expert institutions. The outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development has provided the Strategy with a concrete set of objectives within the sustainable development agenda to which both the Inter-Agency Task Force for Disaster Reduction and the inter-agency secretariat of the Strategy, along with partners, will increasingly turn their attention and capacities in order to integrate and mainstream risk reduction into development policies and processes. The dual aims will be to reduce disasters and to secure development that lowers rather than increases disaster risk. The task is enormous and urgent. Much still needs to be done to increase the awareness and commitment of Governments, business leaders, communities and financial institutions in relation to the specific social and economic advantages of investing in reducing risk and vulnerability.

2. The Task Force and the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction secretariat act as the main institutional mechanisms of the Strategy, and have continued to consolidate their roles. Through these platforms, relevant international, regional and civil society organizations are interacting and building processes to develop common understanding and approaches, to work on shared activities and projects, to guide and monitor progress and to periodically report on achievements and gaps to be addressed. Substantive advice and support are being provided to Governments and other institutions concerned with disasters. Specific technical documents and awareness and educational materials have been developed and are reaching further into communities living in disaster-prone areas. Although the Strategy is still in its early stages, it has demonstrated very great potential for progress, and Governments and institutions can use it as a platform to increase investment.

3. An initiative is currently under way to expand, revitalize and strengthen national platforms for disaster reduction, in particular with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery and United Nations country teams.

4. In order to help raise resources and provide support to the Strategy secretariat, an informal support group of donors was created under the leadership of the Swiss Government, with the full support of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. Under their co-chairmanship, the support group, consisting of the most interested Member States, met three times. That initiative led to increased ownership of the cause and a subsequent increase in the number of countries providing contributions to the Trust Fund for Disaster Reduction. New contributions were made by the Governments of Austria, Cyprus, Finland, Iceland, Italy and Norway as well as by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). In addition, support continued from the Governments of Germany, Japan, the Philippines, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Financial support was also

provided by the World Bank through the United Nations Office for Project Services and the Agence de la Francophonie. Although the number of contributors has increased, it must be noted that financial constraints still exist. Greater financial stability is imperative in order for the Task Force and the Strategy secretariat to cover their core requirements and carry out their mandates.

A. Follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development

5. The World Summit on Sustainable Development provided a timely reminder to the international community that faulty development and inappropriate use of resources are factors that contribute to natural disasters. The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation includes commitments relating to disaster and vulnerability reduction and improved early warning in the sections on protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development, Africa, small island developing States and means of implementation.

6. As requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 57/256 of 20 December 2002, Member States should provide support for the activities of the Commission on Sustainable Development in its efforts to review advances in reducing the negative impacts of natural hazards on communities and development processes. At its eleventh session the Commission adopted the themes of disaster management and vulnerability as those to be reviewed in its fifth cycle (2014-2015). In the light of the cross-cutting nature of the issues, risk management and vulnerability will also be examined in the context of other thematic clusters of the Commission, such as water, sanitation and human settlements (2004-2005) and drought and desertification (2006-2007). In support of this work, the Task Force identified development planning and allocation of adequate resources to reduce vulnerability as one of its main areas of concern in coming years. The Strategy secretariat will continue to collaborate closely with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs to support the Commission's work on this subject. An increased formal collaboration between the Strategy secretariat and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is foreseen in the coming year.

7. Other organizations have also significantly expanded the breadth and scope of their activities in the follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development and in support of efforts by Member States to implement the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. Some of the partnerships launched at the Summit in the area of early warning and disaster preparedness, involving the Strategy, have reported on progress as set out below.

8. The partnership for integrating early warning and disaster risk management into the sustainable development agenda and practice builds on continuing work within the Strategy framework on early warning, and particularly within the Task Force working group on early warning, led by UNEP. The Second International Conference on Early Warning (Bonn, October 2003) is expected to formulate recommendations on how to consolidate a global programme to integrate early warning into public policies. These recommendations are expected to be a major contribution to the action programme to be adopted by Member States at the Second World Conference on Disaster Reduction.

9. The partnership for integrating prevention of, preparedness for and response to environmental emergencies in support of sustainable development, led by the Office

for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and UNEP, makes use of existing resources and distributes responsibilities and efforts among partners and key stakeholders. The practical implementation aspects of this partnership are being explored. The partnership benefited from the support of the Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies and the Senior-level Expert Advisory Group Meeting on the UNEP Awareness and Preparedness for Emergencies at the Local Level programme.

10. The partnership for establishing resilient communities, led by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, aims to operationalize the concept of resilience for local Agenda 21 programmes, particularly to scale up responses to natural, industrial, social and economic disasters; introduce policies, tools and methods developed in the disaster risk management community; and apply the knowledge from disaster management know-how to a broad spectrum of vulnerabilities, including environmental change, economic losses, industrial accidents and social violence. Work is under way to identify cities and resources to engage in the implementation.

11. The Executive Board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has endorsed a main line of action devoted to enhancing disaster prevention and preparedness as a follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Activities aim to capitalize on previous achievements in disaster mitigation and to promote an interdisciplinary approach to natural hazards, the application of science and technology to reduce the impact of natural hazards, multidisciplinary education and training, and disaster awareness of policy makers, community leaders and the public.

12. At its Fourteenth World Meteorological Congress, WMO established a new cross-cutting programme on natural disaster prevention and mitigation, which aims to ensure coordination within WMO programmes and activities on the subject, as well as to provide increased WMO support to the implementation of the Strategy. At the same Congress a new project on natural disaster reduction in coastal lowlands was approved in response to requests made at the Summit. New initiatives from the various programmes of WMO have been included in the Sixth WMO Long-Term Plan (2004-2011). WMO is also involved in regular El Niño monitoring and in the strengthening of the International Research Centre for El Niño, in collaboration with the Government of Ecuador and the Strategy secretariat, in addition to chairing the Task Force working group on climate and disasters. Projects on establishing a climate alert system and on linking climate and disaster databases on floods are being prepared.

13. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has been especially active in supporting Member States in the follow-up to the World Summit in the area of flood management and within the ESCAP/WMO Typhoon Committee and Panel on Tropical Cyclones, to strengthen regional cooperation.

14. UNEP has further developed its strategic policy on emergency prevention, preparedness, assessment, mitigation and response. An analysis of causes and long-term environmental impacts of emergencies and the possible implications for Governments and the international community led to strengthened mandates at the last session of the Governing Council.

B. Review of the work of the Inter-Agency Task Force for Disaster Reduction

15. The review of the activities of the Inter-Agency Task Force for Disaster Reduction,[1] as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 56/195 of 21 December 2001, was carried out through consultations with participating organizations. The Task Force has met seven times since 2000. The first two meetings identified priority areas and clarified the roles of participating members.[2] Working groups were established on climate and disasters, chaired by WMO; early warning, chaired by UNEP; risk, vulnerability and impact assessment, chaired by UNDP; and wildland fires, chaired by the Global Fire Monitoring Centre. An ad hoc discussion group on drought was also established. Additional technical and expert bodies are associated with the work of the Task Force through their participation in the working groups. Furthermore, at its third meeting the Task Force adopted a framework for the implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction as a "living document", which helped to clarify the role of the Task Force vis-à-vis the Strategy secretariat and other partners.

16. The review concluded that the Task Force represents an essential process to enable the international community to develop a better understanding of and strategic direction on disaster reduction as a long-term undertaking. This has been facilitated by the varied composition of the Task Force membership, which includes representatives of United Nations, regional and civil society organizations. The open and inclusive nature of Task Force meetings has enabled a number of Member States and interested organizations to participate in the work of the body. The Task Force appears to be evolving into the hub of a larger network of organizations and entities, from within and outside the United Nations system, having a stake in disaster reduction.

17. The Task Force's various expert consultations, meetings and activities have brought concrete results and even new offshoots to the international disaster reduction community (details of which are contained in the reports of the Task Force meetings, available at www.unisdr.org). At its 7th meeting, in April 2003, the Task Force discussed the nature and prospective role of its working groups, as well as the appropriate balance between the role of the Task Force as an international forum for discussion and the need to produce tangible guidelines and results-oriented products for the benefit of the disaster reduction and development community. The result of the review of the Yokohama Strategy will provide future direction for this work. In the meantime, a transitional programme of work for 2004 includes support for the development of a framework for guidance and monitoring of disaster risk reduction; urban risk and vulnerability; integration of disaster reduction in sustainable development; linking climate change adaptation and disaster reduction; and special attention to Africa.

18. Through the review, Task Force members also identified a number of weaknesses and shortcomings to be addressed, including the need to:

- Adopt a more strategic role and focus on devising strategies and policies and identifying gaps in disaster reduction policies and programmes
- Raise the profile of disaster reduction within the United Nations and obtain support from the regular budget, and to ensure the transition and connection

between the relief and humanitarian system and the development sectors under a sustainable development approach

- Ensure that the work carried out by the working groups provides specific advice on the integration of their various subjects and products into policy development and integration processes, with a client-oriented approach to help decision-making and to guide disaster reduction, while keeping in sight other less urgent but equally important areas of work. These can be addressed through ad hoc mechanisms involving a few interested Task Force members
- Include organizations representing local authorities and those whose core work relates to sustainable development. The Task Force also needs to enhance its political profile and visibility.

The review concluded that the Task Force has made a positive and substantive contribution, despite the limited funds available to support its activities.

C. Global review of disaster reduction initiatives and achievements since the adoption of the Yokohama Strategy

19. In pursuance of General Assembly resolution 57/256, the Task Force and the Strategy secretariat initiated the review of the Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World: Guidelines for Natural Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Mitigation and its Plan of Action[3] to examine achievements in the implementation of disaster reduction, identify gaps and prepare recommendations for future priorities to guide action by Member States. The review takes into account several relevant processes, such as the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the 10-year review and preparation of follow-up actions to the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and the launching of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014).

20. An important development for the review is the proposed framework for guidance and monitoring of disaster risk reduction. The goal of this new framework is to increase the understanding and effectiveness of disaster risk reduction practices through a participatory process and building on existing praxis. It aims to specify the main elements and principles of disaster reduction, in order to guide action and to define benchmarks and other indicators that can be used to monitor efforts and assess progress. The Strategy secretariat, with UNDP, has convened a broad-based Internet consultation with experts worldwide. The Task Force will assist and advise on the process, with several individual Task Force members being directly involved in the process, in addition to the ProVention Consortium.

21. The Strategy secretariat will soon be requesting national and regional reports on progress, achievements and shortcomings in the realization of disaster reduction. A series of regional and thematic consultations are already being held in association with conferences organized by partner organizations. The first regional consultation was held in Asia, hosted by the Government of Japan, at Hyogo Prefecture, in January 2003. The South Pacific island States discussed achievements, shortcomings and requirements for the future in a meeting hosted by the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC) in Fiji in May 2003, and the Euro-Mediterranean Forum on Disaster Reduction will do likewise in Madrid in October 2003. Several other thematic and regional consultations will be taking place in 2003 and 2004.

Available results will be presented in the 2003 edition of the Strategy's flagship publication, *Living with Risk: A Global Review of Disaster Reduction Initiatives*, and will be updated in the 2004 edition.

22. The review of the Yokohama Strategy and the outcome of the Second International Conference on Early Warning are expected to provide substantive justification for renewing and elevating political commitment towards disaster reduction and to motivate further actions of Governments and communities through an expanded programme for the period 2005-2015, to coincide with the targets of the Millennium Development Goals and the Commission on Sustainable Development. This programme should be discussed and adopted at the Second World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which will bring together technical experts and delegates from Member States, tentatively to be held in Japan in January 2005.

D. Additional partnerships

23. Pursuant to requests from the General Assembly, progress has been made in engaging additional partner organizations to improve the implementation of the Strategy. Partnerships are crucial to the Strategy secretariat. Several agreements were reached, covering issues such as urban risk (with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)); study of the interface between natural and technological disasters (with the European Commission Joint Research Centre); the impacts of climate variability and change (with the International Research Institute for Climate Prediction); and support for public awareness, education and policy integration for disaster risk reduction at the national level through consolidation of multisectoral platforms for disaster reduction at national and regional levels (with the Central American Centre for Coordination of Natural Disaster Prevention (CEPREDENAC)). A number of other agreements are being prepared with several other regional organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

24. The International Consortium on Landslides and the International Programme on Landslides were established in November 2002 to promote international coordination on landslide issues. The Strategy secretariat participated in the preparation and steering committee of the Consortium, along with UNESCO, WMO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Governments of Canada, Italy, Japan, Norway and the United States of America. Twenty-five projects relating to fundamental research on landslides; a global database on landslide hazard assessment; landslide risk mitigation; cultural and societal aspects; and capacity-building, communication and information were selected for implementation.

25. The Strategy secretariat continued to collaborate closely with the ProVention Consortium, a project-oriented global coalition and flexible network of Governments, international organizations, academic institutions, the private sector and civil society organizations. The physical proximity of the ProVention secretariat, which was recently transferred to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in Geneva, will further enhance the working relationship between the Strategy secretariat, UNDP, OCHA and IFRC.

26. Moreover, in line with efforts to enhance coordination within the United Nations system, UNDP, OCHA and the Strategy secretariat undertook a preliminary self-assessment of their natural disaster-related activities. In addition to identifying specific areas of synergy and enhancement of practical work among the three entities, in particular to support regional and national capacities, this exercise led to greater collaboration and understanding of their principal roles and functions, namely:

- OCHA as the coordinating body for international humanitarian assistance
- the Strategy secretariat as the coordinating body for the implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and of disaster reduction policy and advocacy at the international level
- UNDP as the organization for national capacity-building in disaster reduction and support for humanitarian coordination at the national level through the Resident Coordinator system.

It is expected that this tripartite arrangement will evolve further to encompass other key partners, such as IFRC and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee members, through the creation of a task force on natural disasters within the framework of the Standing Committee.

E. Regional outreach

27. Regional outreach is central to the implementation of the Strategy because it is a means to introduce best practices through policy integration, advocacy and information-sharing, to help foster and strengthen cooperation on disaster reduction among existing regional stakeholders, to federate and cross-fertilize them and to lead to the enhancement of regional partnerships. Progress has been most notable in Africa.

Africa

28. Africa is subjected to a variety of natural disasters, especially large-scale floods, drought and associated food insecurity, tropical storms and volcanic eruptions, which not only cause considerable losses but also exacerbate other chronic problems of the region, such as poverty, conflicts and HIV/AIDS. The Strategy secretariat launched an African outreach programme in October 2002, with a staff member hosted by UNEP in Nairobi. In collaboration with the UNDP disaster reduction regional adviser and other regional experts, the African programme is working closely with a range of entities and is actively contributing to events relating to disaster reduction, providing multilevel advocacy on the linkages among disaster reduction, environmental protection, climate change, poverty alleviation and sustainable development. This has been targeted at policy makers and managers at the regional, subregional and national levels. Work in disaster reduction is picking up momentum and more effort is being made to link disaster risk management to important regional frameworks such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

29. The African outreach programme also provides opportunities for consultation and exchange of knowledge and information — for example through the web site www.unisdrafrica.org and a biannual publication on disaster reduction in Africa, and

in response to direct requests from many subregional actors. An educational series for public awareness, produced jointly with the Drought Monitoring Centre in Nairobi, has elicited positive feedback from teachers and requests for more information.

30. The African programme has promoted cooperation and collaboration in mainstreaming gender concerns in disaster reduction in Africa. At a recent meeting of European and African women professionals and business executives, the programme presented a well-received proposal to work with women in Africa to carry out a joint study on early warning practices from a gender perspective and co-organized a regional conference on the gender perspective in disaster reduction and sustainable development.

31. A strategy to support the development of national capacities and platforms for disaster reduction is being prepared with UNDP. International Strategy for Disaster Reduction national platform workshops were held in Djibouti, Uganda and Madagascar. Initial consultations were carried out with the Economic Community of West African States and the Southern African Development Community on cooperation in areas of advocacy, information management and policy development for disaster reduction.

Latin America and the Caribbean

32. The outreach programme for Latin America and the Caribbean, based in Costa Rica in joint offices with the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), was consolidated in the course of 2003. Strengthening capacity for the more effective regional implementation of the Strategy at various levels has been at the core of collaborative efforts with UNDP, OCHA and subregional partners such as CEPREDENAC, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA), the Association of Caribbean States, the Community of Andean Nations, the Andean Development Bank and the newly established Andean Committee for Disaster Prevention and Response.

33. Addressing the needs of local communities at high risk, outreach in Latin America and the Caribbean has continued to focus on developing innovative awareness and educational tools and partnerships. Support for regional policies and institutional strengthening has also been provided to the International El Niño Research Centre launched in January 2003 with the Government of Ecuador and WMO.

34. The Regional Disaster Information Centre, an initiative sponsored by PAHO/World Health Organization (WHO), the Strategy secretariat, the Government of Costa Rica, IFRC, CEPREDENAC and Doctors without Borders, has scaled up its activities in the course of the past year, and now maintains a collection of more than 14,000 documents, including many in full-text electronic format.

35. UNDP, PAHO/WHO and other partners have supported CDERA in the development and implementation of a Comprehensive Disaster Management Project, which has been endorsed and adopted by its 16 participating States. UNDP is currently supporting the development of subregional knowledge networking initiatives in the Caribbean, such as the Caribbean Risk Management Initiative, which is focused on linking climate-change adaptation and disaster reduction.

Asia

36. A number of substantive programmes in Asia are being enhanced through efforts by the relevant regional actors and the Strategy secretariat in order to improve collaboration and the harmonization of institutional development and policy support activities. Partners include the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre in Bangkok, the Asian Disaster Reduction Centre in Kobe, ESCAP and UNDP, among others.

37. ESCAP, supported by China, India and the European Space Agency, launched a project on capacity-building for disaster management in Asia and the Pacific, which focuses on enabling participating countries to enhance their capacity and organize their internal resources to integrate space technology for natural disaster reduction, particularly in terms of floods and droughts, and also to ensure that they can receive efficient support from international space-based initiatives. The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has developed a comprehensive Regional Programme on Disaster Management, which consolidates the disaster management activities of individual ASEAN member countries and promotes greater cooperation among them. The Mekong River Commission has developed a long-term Flood Management Programme, based on the priorities identified by its member countries for 2002-2008.

The Pacific

38. Efforts are currently focused on supporting the activities of key regional organizations, in particular SOPAC, in collaboration with other partners, such as Australia and New Zealand, that have a long history of regional cooperation with Pacific Member States on disaster reduction. SOPAC has contributed to enhancing the capacities of Member States in the region to assess disaster risk management and to implement the Strategy, and has launched a three-year Community Risk Programme to improve hazard assessment and risk management practices in order to build safer communities. SOPAC, the Strategy secretariat and other partners are developing a proposal for a regional cooperation project and are working towards establishing an International Strategy for Disaster Reduction outpost in the region to strengthen disaster reduction efforts.

Europe

39. The Strategy secretariat is engaged with European partners in a regional outreach initiative building upon existing capacities and networks across both the European and the Mediterranean regions. It includes national platforms, Governments, academia and other relevant sectors in a broad-based dialogue involving the principal international networks present in the region. Following an invitation made by the German Government, a first meeting of European national platforms took place in Bonn in January 2003. Consultations have been held with both the European Commission and the Council of Europe, which, together with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, are at the core of a future regional partnership in Europe. One key milestone is the Euro-Mediterranean Forum on Disaster Reduction, which is expected to enhance collaboration across the region.

F. Other activities

40. United Nations agencies and partners have implemented a broad range of activities that have made a substantial contribution to the implementation of the Strategy. Outlined below are some of the activities conducted during the reporting period.

Capacity-building

41. UNDP has increased its capacity to deliver disaster reduction assistance to countries worldwide through four disaster reduction regional advisers supported by five programme specialists, supporting more than 40 countries during the past year. National capacity-building and institutional strengthening to develop risk reduction strategies and national platforms have been developed in Albania, Haiti and Madagascar, among other countries. The inter-agency Disaster Management Training Programme strengthened the capacities of 17 United Nations country teams in the past year. UNDP has supported local risk reduction planning; in Central America and the Caribbean 150 local risk reduction committees in hurricane-affected countries have received support. In addition, more than 100 local committees have benefited, in countries such as Albania, Madagascar, Malawi and Viet Nam. These efforts represent a major contribution to the objectives of the Strategy by enabling communities to become resilient to the effects of disasters.

42. IFRC developed a self-assessment process with its 179 National Societies to provide a global overview of capacity and resources in the field of disaster risk reduction and preparedness worldwide and to assist the National Societies in planning and benchmarking their work more effectively. More than 60 National Societies received support for developing their capacities in disaster management, including proactive measures to reduce risk. IFRC has also developed risk, vulnerability and capacity assessments to identify and analyse risk related to natural disasters in communities and at the national level. One important finding is that these assessments need to be carried out in partnership with Government authorities and actors such as the United Nations and non-governmental organizations if they are to lead to effective programmes.

43. The office of the United Nations Centre for Regional Development in Hyogo, Japan, launched a training programme in Afghanistan to increase the capacities of the national and local governments by offering technical support to achieve safer construction practices. The Centre's three-year project on sustainability in community-based disaster management, aimed at achieving safety and sustainability of livelihoods through effective disaster mitigation at the community level, is being formulated, based on the analysis of successful practices and experiences of several pilot projects in Asia.

Public awareness, advocacy and guidelines

44. In line with the International Year of Freshwater, the 2003 World Disaster Reduction Campaign focuses on the significance of water in the field of disaster reduction and aims at changing people's perceptions and attitudes towards hydrometeorological disasters. In addition to the International Day for Disaster Reduction, 8 October, the campaign is extended to the World Day for Water

celebrations to be held in March 2004, jointly coordinated by WMO and the Strategy secretariat. The theme will be "water and disasters".

45. The 2002 edition of the IFRC *World Disasters Report* focused on reducing risk and identifying challenges and opportunities. The report is now guiding action for many national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The UNDP *World Vulnerability Report*, which will be available at the end of 2003, will highlight contemporary trends in the evolution of natural disaster risk and vulnerability patterns and will advocate relevant policies and strategies for reducing disaster risk. The report is complementary to the Strategy's publication *Living with Risk*, and next year these two reports will be integrated. The first edition of the United Nations *World Water Development Report* is the fruit of collaboration among 23 United Nations agencies and convention secretariats. It lays the foundation for regular, system-wide monitoring and reporting by the United Nations and the development of standardized methodologies and data.

46. A number of technical guidelines and handbooks were prepared, including, by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, a handbook for estimating the socio-economic and environmental effects of disasters; by ESCAP, guidelines on participatory planning and management for flood mitigation and preparedness; and, jointly prepared by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United States/National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, WMO, ESCAP and the Strategy secretariat, guidelines for reducing flood loss.

Urban risk

47. Several initiatives were undertaken to address urban risk. UN-Habitat consulted with local authorities, disaster management sectors and housing ministries in the Caribbean and Central American region in 2002, and a programme involving communities in support of a city network to improve capacities to deal with disaster risks is under development. A pilot project with UNESCO was initiated in February 2003 to further develop and apply a local and urban risk assessment methodology in four cities in Latin America and the Caribbean. This is based on the experience of the Risk Assessment Tools for Diagnosis of Urban Areas against Seismic Disaster and is limited to other initiatives of UN-Habitat and the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives. The Asian Urban Disaster Mitigation Programme of the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre, an eight-year programme funded by the United States Agency for International Development and the United States Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, is engaged in implementing risk mitigation programmes in 14 cities in Asia. It also offers training courses on urban disaster mitigation and earthquake vulnerability reduction in cities for regional, national and local groups, with the objective of promoting the replication and adaptation of successful mitigation measures. In January 2003 UNDP hosted a regional workshop in Nairobi to discuss the risk accumulation trends in urbanized areas and to develop a plan of action for awareness-raising among local and national governments, non-governmental organizations and international agencies in Africa.

The water agenda and drought

48. The Third World Water Forum, held in Kyoto in March 2003, constituted an opportunity for progress in integrating risk management as a component of integrated water management. Water-related disasters and solutions were discussed

in technical and ministerial policy round tables. The Strategy secretariat, in collaboration with the Asian Disaster Reduction Centre, convened a meeting during the Forum on living with risk and steps for effective disaster reduction, and ESCAP conducted a discussion on regional cooperation in flood preparedness and reduction. A report was prepared on the role that insurance and other financial services can play in risk management in connection with water and climate. A joint project of WMO and the Global Water Partnership was launched on flood management in the context of integrated water resource management.

49. The Task Force ad hoc discussion group on drought prepared an outline for a global drought risk reduction network to support regional networks. This initiative will facilitate the exchange of experiences and lessons learned and promote improved relationships among existing drought early warning systems. ESCAP and UNDP projects on regional drought preparedness networks are ongoing.

50. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, with 188 ratifications to date, facilitates the assistance to countries in the collection, analysis and exchange of relevant data and information, which are essential for systematic observation of the desertification process and for assessing the impact of drought. The secretariats of the Convention and of the Strategy have discussed how this activity could contribute to the implementation of the Strategy and the networks on drought. A drought preparedness and mitigation programme to promote the use of climate information in decision-making by farmers is being implemented by WMO in collaboration with the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and national and regional partners.

Space applications and telecommunications

51. The United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs pursued its activities in the field of space applications for disaster reduction. In 2003, the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space recognized the contributions of the Strategy secretariat in the development of space programmes in relation to natural disaster reduction, in particular in the conduct of two regional workshops on the use of space for natural disaster management held during the reporting period. The workshop for Asia, organized by ESCAP, in cooperation with the Office for Outer Space Affairs, recommended follow-up activities on floods and droughts and identified possible pilot projects for implementation. Another was held in Romania for Europe.

52. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) World Telecommunication Development Conference, held in Istanbul in 2002, issued a number of recommendations to promote the use of telecommunication resources for disaster mitigation and relief operations and for early warning services. ITU recently entered into a co-financing arrangement in which a private sector entity provided financing for the procurement of satellite terminals and ITU provided financing for airtime. The equipment will be used in disaster mitigation and relief. The World Summit on the Information Society (Geneva, December 2003, and Tunis, November 2005) is expected to provide an opportunity to enhance disaster reduction through information technology.

II. Negative impacts of extreme weather events and associated natural disasters on vulnerable countries

53. This section responds to the special request of the General Assembly in its decision 57/547 of 20 December 2002 for a report to the Assembly at its fifty-eighth session on the negative impacts of extreme weather events and associated natural disasters on vulnerable countries, in particular developing countries. The impact of extreme weather events around the globe is enormous, and continues to handicap the advancement of the struggling developing economies. In June 2003 alone, a summary by the International Research Institute for Climate Prediction of Columbia University[4] noted flooding in south-western Sri Lanka with approximately 300 deaths, 200,000 persons displaced and heavy economic damage; a pre-monsoon heat wave in India with more than 1,000 deaths; flooding in Ethiopia and western Kenya with more than 160,000 people displaced; and increases in cases of hepatitis and leptospirosis in Argentina associated with flood conditions. The catastrophic floods of August in Europe caused losses of nearly $20 billion. The impact of the severe winter for Mongolia was equal to 15 per cent of the country's gross national income, while fatalities from tropical storms in the Federated States of Micronesia reached the exceptionally high rate of 40 per 100,000 people.

54. A very serious concern is the substantial increase in the impacts of weather-related disasters over the past three decades. Average economic losses from extreme weather events in the 1990s were six times as great as in the 1960s. Of equal concern is the conclusion of a UNDP meeting of experts[5] that developing countries are disproportionately affected, with their losses rising to about five times as high per unit of gross domestic product as those of rich countries, sometimes exceeding a year's worth or more of hard-won and desperately needed economic development.

55. Disasters associated with weather — such as droughts, floods, landslides, storms, fires, and sometimes epidemics and pest outbreaks — far outstrip other types of disasters. The broad regional patterns of risk are well known — for example, the tropical hurricane zones, the drought-prone semi-arid regions and the regions affected by El Niño events — but the details of timing, location and intensity of particular extreme events are largely random and unpredictable, except for forecasts of El Niño a season or two ahead and warnings of tropical cyclones and other severe weather a few days ahead. Extreme weather and climate events are a natural feature of the climate system that human society must continue to adapt to. It is reasonable to ask whether the increase in disaster impacts is due to changes in the climate. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has warned that the Earth's climate is very likely to change over the decades to come, owing to increases in concentrations of atmospheric greenhouse gases caused by human activity, with likely increases in temperatures, sea levels and extreme weather events (heavy rainfalls and droughts). IPCC assessments of historical climate data have shown a rise in global average temperatures and sea levels over the course of the twentieth century. However, these same assessments have pointed to only small or inconclusive changes to date in the weather factors that are dominant in disasters, such as heavy rainfall, drought or storminess. Some of the observed changes are linked to the tendency for El Niño events to be somewhat stronger over the last 30 years, but it should be noted that IPCC projections indicate only relatively small changes in El Niño amplitudes over the next 100 years. While climate change is a serious threat in the long term and may already be affecting disaster risks, the

changes observed to date in the characteristics of weather and climate hazards are insufficient to explain the rapid increase in disasters.

56. Meanwhile, the consensus view of disaster risk reduction professionals indicates that the vulnerability of societies to the existing level of hazards is increasing. It is widely recognized that many countries are rapidly accumulating large latent risk burdens through the concentration of growing populations in hazardous situations, the stripping of environmental capacities to withstand hazards, and the creation of new social and economic vulnerabilities because of migration, urban development and economic growth. The reinsurance industry also points to increasing densities of exposed and insured assets. Increasingly, when a hazard event occurs, it exposes a large accumulation of risk, unleashing unexpected levels of impacts. Disasters are thus a manifestation of unsustainability.

57. At the same time, climate change remains highly relevant to disasters and their reduction for several important reasons. Firstly, the existing trends evident in weather parameters, though quite small, may already be exacerbating the impacts of some hazard events, especially where social and environmental stresses are already high. Secondly, IPCC has consistently projected the likelihood of increased frequency and intensity of hazards in the future. When and where these changes will become manifest is very uncertain, so precautionary preparations are essential. Steps that enhance our ability to cope with the existing climate will be especially desirable and cost-effective. Thirdly, the experience of countries in managing current climate fluctuations and extremes — for example, multi-year droughts — can provide valuable lessons for dealing with projected longer-term changes. Fourthly, disaster reduction provides a solid, meaningful, no-regrets set of activities in support of climate change adaptation plans. Finally, mitigation policies and initiatives to reduce emissions are likely to change the nature of climate-related risks — for example, through land-use changes.

58. To address these issues, the Strategy secretariat and partners are working to promote the use of disaster reduction as a primary and readily implemented component of climate change adaptation strategies. This complements efforts to mainstream disaster reduction into development strategies. An initiative is under way to prepare an authoritative, multi-stakeholder report on the topic; this was launched at a side event to the June 2003 meeting of the subsidiary bodies of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Bonn, with the co-sponsorship of the German Technical Cooperation and the Centre for Climate Change and Disaster Preparedness, established by the Netherlands Red Cross in 2002 in cooperation with IFRC. Work on technical matters, such as the development of better databases on disasters, risks, vulnerabilities and hazards, is continuing, and the active involvement of disaster reduction experts in the next IPCC assessment, due in 2007, is being promoted.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

59. **Although global warming is not the primary cause of present disaster trends, the two issues are intimately linked and must be dealt with in an integrated manner. It is clear that the management and reduction of climate-related risk has become a central issue of our time. Disaster risk reduction is a potent no-regrets solution for adapting nationally to climate change.**

Interaction and coordination among the development, disaster risk management and climate communities are essential in order to identify and reduce current and future climatic risks. The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction provides the framework for collaboration on the development of methodologies to systematically characterize, measure, assess and respond to weather-related disasters, hazards and vulnerabilities, and trends therein, at the local, national, regional and international levels. This would include coordination and the promotion of disaster reduction as a climate change adaptation strategy and advising the secretariat of the Framework Convention on Climate Change, IPCC and other relevant United Nations entities on risk reduction options.

60. Member States and international organizations need to ensure that development plans and poverty reduction strategies include disaster risk assessment as an integral component and increase their investments to reduce risk and vulnerability if development gains are not to be wiped out, in particular in the least developed countries and small island developing States. Natural and technological hazards, along with the increasing threat of HIV/AIDS, other epidemics and complex emergencies, need to be tackled through common approaches and team efforts by the international community if development goals are to be achieved.

61. The review of the 1994 Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action is expected to show a need to increase the commitment to disaster reduction. A broad consensus is emerging on the need to move towards a more specific action programme in the coming years to guide and monitor disaster reduction worldwide. The Second World Conference on Disaster Reduction will provide an opportunity for Member States and expert institutions to discuss and adopt a set of principles and substantive activities for 2005-2015, thus contributing to the fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and other United Nations development objectives. At its seventh meeting in April 2003, the Task Force welcomed and endorsed the offer made by Japan to host such a conference in Kobe. Member States are encouraged to endorse the convening of the Conference with the principal objectives of identifying achievements and gaps to be addressed and of setting the vision and recommendations for the future work of the Strategy and for the implementation of disaster reduction at all levels.

62. This year, the Second International Conference on Early Warning is expected to launch a substantive programme to facilitate dialogue and cooperation on early warning issues at the global and regional levels as an integral element of disaster reduction policy. The Conference will include practical steps to improve the integration of warnings into policy and management and the facilitation of relevant activities, interests and expertise. The results of the Conference are expected to be an important component of the action programme to be launched by the Second World Conference on Disaster Reduction. Member States are encouraged to provide substantive support for this initiative.

63. The work of the Task Force should receive more sustained political and financial support in line with the recently conducted review of activities. The political profile and visibility of disaster reduction per se, and of the Strategy,

should continue to be enhanced. To that end, the profile of Task Force meetings must be further raised, including through the organization of sessions at which member organizations and entities should be represented at the highest level. At the same time, the chair of the Task Force should continue to ensure that its working groups constitute ad hoc arrangements with clearly defined objectives and schedules, and that their activities are in line with the overall mandate and objectives of the Task Force.

64. **The Strategy secretariat should continue to be strengthened, in keeping with General Assembly resolutions 54/219 of 22 December 1999, 56/195 and 57/256. Disaster reduction is relevant to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. It is both a humanitarian and a development responsibility and must be considered as a part of the core functions of the United Nations. A more stable and predictable base of financial resources is required if the Strategy secretariat is to effectively meet the growing needs of Member States. Member States are encouraged to support the process of consolidation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction as an essential instrument for sustainable development and to provide adequate resources to the Trust Fund for Disaster Reduction.**

Notes

[1] The Task Force was established to: (a) serve as the main forum within the United Nations system for formulating strategies and policies for disaster reduction; (b) identify gaps in disaster reduction policies and programmes and recommend remedial action; (c) provide policy guidance to the Strategy secretariat; and (d) convene ad hoc meetings of experts on issues related to disaster reduction. It is chaired by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and the Director of the Strategy secretariat acts as Secretary.

[2] Current members include: African Union, Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre, Asian Disaster Reduction Centre, Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, Council of Europe, Drought Monitoring Centre, FAO, Global Fire Monitoring Centre, Ibero-American Association of Civil Defence and Civil Protection, Organization of American States, International Council of Science, International CIS Council, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, International Telecommunication Union, Munich Reinsurance, South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission, UNDP, UNESCO, UNEP, UN-Habitat, United Nations University, World Bank, WFP, WHO and WMO.

[3] Adopted at the first World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, Yokohama, 1994. It has since then served as the international blueprint for disaster reduction and the basis for the adoption of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

[4] See http://iri.columbia.edu/climate/cid/Jun2003/.

[5] See www.undp.org/erd/disred/docs/Riskadaptationintegrated.doc.